The "Transgression That Makes Desolate" and the "Abomination of Desolation": One Event in Daniel 8 and 11

Executive Summary

Daniel 8:13 and Daniel 11:31 use two distinct but linguistically and thematically unified Hebrew phrases — *pesha‘ shômem* ("transgression that makes desolate") and *shiqqûts shômem* ("abomination of desolation") — to describe the same pattern of sacrilegious desecration of the Jerusalem Temple. Both passages share the operative root *shômem* (שֹׁמֵם, "desolation/appalling ruin"), and both describe the same sequence of events: removal of the *tamid* (daily sacrifice), profanation of the sanctuary, and the trampling of God's people by a foreign power. While the *immediate* historical referent in both chapters is Antiochus IV Epiphanes (167–164 BC), the historical markers embedded in each vision — and Jesus's explicit citation of Daniel in his Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:15) — demonstrate that the complete typological fulfillment arrived in the first century CE with the Roman siege and destruction of Jerusalem in AD 66–70. What Daniel encoded in two chapters, Jesus declared imminent for his own generation, and what Josephus, Eusebius, and multiple early church witnesses confirmed as having occurred.

Part I: The Hebrew Terminology — *Pesha‘ Shômem* vs. *Shiqqûts Shômem*

The Shared Root: *Shômem*

The pivotal word linking Daniel 8 and Daniel 11 is the Hebrew root *shômem* (שָׁמֵם), which carries the dual sense of "to be desolated, ravaged" and "to be appalled, awestruck" — a condition of speechless horror at sacrilege. The *Holman Bible Dictionary* confirms that the term "permeates the book of Daniel (Daniel 8:13; 9:2, 9:17–18, 9:26–27; 11:31; and 12:11)," making it the connective tissue of Daniel's entire desolation theology.[1][2]

As BibleHub's interlinear analysis demonstrates, the phrase *pesha‘ shômem* of Daniel 8:13 is linguistically "the first of four closely related expressions in Daniel (8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11) that speak of cultic desecration culminating in 'desolation'". The four occurrences form a unified prophetic cluster, not four independent concepts.[3]

The Distinguishing Word: *Pesha‘* vs. *Shiqqûts*

Passage	Hebrew Phrase	Key Noun	Meaning
Daniel 8:13	*pesha‘ shômem*	*pesha‘*	Transgression, rebellion — act of covenant breach
Daniel 9:27	*shiqqûtsîm meshomem*	*shiqqûts*	Detestable idol — idolatrous object
Daniel 11:31	*shiqqûts shômem*	*shiqqûts*	Detestable/abominable thing (an idol)
Daniel 12:11	*shiqqûts shômem*	*shiqqûts*	Same as 11:31

The shift from *pesha‘* (transgression) in chapter 8 to *shiqqûts* (abomination/idol) in chapter 11 is significant: Daniel 8 emphasizes the *act* of sacrilegious rebellion as the cause of desolation, while Daniel 11:31 identifies the specific *object* placed in the sanctuary — a profane idol — as the abomination that produces desolation. The theological logic is identical: an abominable desecration renders the sanctuary desolate. Daniel's vision in chapter 8 thus frames the underlying moral category (*transgression*), while chapter 11 names the visible historical object (*abomination*) that concretized it. Scholar

Desmond Ford concluded: "Daniel 11:31 is saying in different words the same thing as Daniel 8:9–13, and…a broader understanding of Daniel 8:14 may be secured through this second and enlarged description of the situation".[4][2][5]

Part II: The Historical Markers in Daniel 8 — From Medo-Persia Through the "Little Horn"

The Ram: Medo-Persian Empire (Daniel 8:3–4, 20)

The angel Gabriel interprets the imagery directly (Dan. 8:20). The two-horned ram represents the dual kingdom of Media and Persia: the shorter horn (Media) was older and subordinate; the higher horn that came up last (Persia) eventually dominated under Cyrus. The ram pushed "westward, northward, and southward" — a precise description of Persia's conquest under Cyrus and Cambyses, which Herodotus documents as stretching "across all Asia" to the Aegean Sea. The *Nabonidus Chronicle* independently confirms Cyrus's decisive victory that unified Medo-Persian power.[6][7]

The Goat: Alexander the Great and Greece (Daniel 8:5–8, 21)

The he-goat from the west with a conspicuous horn came "without touching the ground" — reflecting the astonishing speed of Alexander's campaign (Dan. 8:5). Alexander shattered the Medo-Persian empire at Granicus (334 BC), Issus (333 BC), and Gaugamela (331 BC), and the Babylonian "Alexander Chronicles" (cuneiform astronomical diary BM 36761) confirm his 331 BC entry into Babylon. Then "the large horn was broken" (v. 8) — Alexander died suddenly in Babylon in 323 BC at age 32, a death that his own generals could not have arranged; the Hebrew verb *nishberāh* points to providential, not political, causation.[8][9]

The Four Horns: The Diadochi (Daniel 8:8)

In the twenty-two years following Alexander's death, his generals — the *Diadochi* — partitioned the empire into four primary realms, precisely fulfilling Daniel's "four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven":[9]

1. **Cassander** — Macedon and Greece (west)
2. **Lysimachus** — Thrace and Asia Minor (north)
3. **Seleucus I Nicator** — Syria and Mesopotamia (east)
4. **Ptolemy I Soter** — Egypt (south)

Polybius (*Histories* 5.34) and Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca* 19–20) corroborate the tetrarchic partition.[9]

The Little Horn: Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the *Peshaʿ Shômem* (Daniel 8:9–13)

Out of the Seleucid horn arose "a rather small horn" that grew toward the south (his Egyptian campaigns, 169–168 BC), the east (Persia, 166 BC), and "toward the Beautiful Land" (Israel). This is Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BC), a figure so precisely described that the Dead Sea Scroll 4QDan^{a} (dated c. 125 BC) confirms the text existed before the events it describes.[10][3]

The specific acts Daniel 8:9–13 attributes to the little horn align in exacting detail with what 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, and Josephus (*Antiquities* 12.5) record of Antiochus:

- **"The daily sacrifice was taken away"** (v. 11) — Antiochus outlawed the *tamid* in 167 BC[11][3]
- **"The place of his sanctuary was cast down"** (v. 11) — The temple was profaned[10]
- **"Truth was flung to the ground"** (v. 12) — Torah scrolls were burned[3][10]
- **"The transgression that makes desolate"** (*peshaʿ shômem*) in v. 13 — explicitly identified by Sam Storms and other commentators as "an allusion to AE's blasphemous act of setting up a statue of Zeus in the temple," which Daniel 11:31 then calls by its full title, "the abomination of desolation"[12]

On 25 Kislev, 167 BC, Antiochus erected an altar to Zeus on the burnt offering altar, offered a pig on it, and desecrated the sanctuary in fulfillment of what the holy one's question in Daniel 8:13 anticipated. Seleucid coins bearing the title "Theos Epiphanes" (God Manifest) illustrate his self-deification, archaeologically corroborating Daniel's description of the horn magnifying himself "even to the Prince of the host" (v. 11). The Hellenistic Acra fortress south of the Temple Mount, excavated in 2015–2018, further substantiates the military enforcement of Antiochus's decrees.[11][4][3]

Part III: The Historical Markers in Daniel 11 — Confirming the Same Sequence

The Panoramic Historical Ladder (Daniel 11:2–20)

Daniel 11 constitutes what scholars regularly call "the most detailed prophecy in the Bible". Its sequence is archaeologically verifiable and moves without interruption through:[13]

- **v. 2**: Three more Persian kings after Darius, then a powerful fourth (Xerxes, 486–465 BC) who stirred all against Greece[13]
- **v. 3–4**: "A mighty king" arises (Alexander), then his kingdom breaks "toward the four winds" — identical to Daniel 8's four-horn motif[14][13]
- **v. 5–20**: The "king of the North" (Seleucids) and "king of the South" (Ptolemies) series of wars, with identifiable battles: Raphia (217 BC), Panium (198 BC), all traceable in Polybius and corroborated by Egyptian papyri and Seleucid administrative records[15][14]

Antiochus IV Epiphanes in Daniel 11:21–35 and the *Shiqqûts Shômem*

The transition to Antiochus IV at v. 21 is explicit; the text describes a "contemptible person" who seizes the kingdom through intrigue — Antiochus used political manipulation to displace the legitimate heir. The detailed campaign history of Daniel 11:21–30 maps onto known Seleucid records:[13]

- **v. 28**: "In the winter of 169/168, Antiochus IV was in Jerusalem" on his return from Egypt, setting his heart against the holy covenant[16]
- **v. 29–30**: A second southern invasion was stopped by "ships of the western coastlands" — this is the famous Roman *Popilius Laenas* incident, when the Roman legate drew a circle in the sand around Antiochus and demanded he withdraw from Egypt before the Romans could respond. Livy (*Ab Urbe Condita* 45.12) and Polybius (29.27) both record this event[16]
- **v. 31**: "His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the *abomination of desolation*" (*shiqqûts shômem*)[17][18]

The *shiqqûts shômem* of Daniel 11:31 is therefore the fully explicit naming of the act that Daniel 8:13 called *peshaʿ shômem*. Both describe the identical theological reality — the profaning desecration of the sanctuary that renders it desolate — just from different vantage points: chapter 8 frames it as the *transgressive act of rebellion*, chapter 11 frames it as the *idolatrous object erected*.[2][4]

Part IV: The Typological Bridge — Antiochus as Prototype, Rome as Fulfillment

The Prophetic Pattern

Biblical typology operates on the principle that God encodes a later, greater event within an earlier, lesser fulfillment. The scholarly consensus recognizes this structure in Daniel 8 and 11 explicitly. As Josephus himself — a Jewish historian entirely hostile to any Christian reading — recognized, "both Antiochus IV and the Romans had desecrated God's temple," and "the passage of time allowed Josephus to recognise recapitulation in the latter". This typological recognition is remarkable coming from a non-Christian source.[19]

The parallel between what Antiochus did (167 BC) and what Rome did (AD 70) is nearly point-for-point:

Action	Antiochus IV (167 BC)	Roman Army under Titus (AD 70)
Remove daily sacrifice	Outlawed the *tamid*	Siege caused cessation (17th Tamuz, AD 70); earlier, Eleazar's revolt stopped imperial sacrifices (AD 66)[20][21]
Defile sanctuary	Entered temple, plundered, massacred[11]	Breached temple complex, burned sanctuary[22]
Set up idolatrous object	Altar of Zeus; pig sacrifice on 25 Kislev 167 BC[11][4]	Ensigns (Aquila/eagle of Zeus, *Imago* of Caesar) erected on eastern gate; sacrifices offered to them (Josephus, *Wars* 6.6.1)[23][24]
Pagan sacrifice of swine	Pig on altar to Zeus[4]	*Legio X Fretensis* (emblem: boar); *suovetaurilia* (includes pig) likely performed[24]
Trample people and sanctuary	Jewish *host* trampled under the little horn[25]	Over 1,000,000 killed (Josephus); temple burned to ground[26]

Josephus's *Wars of the Jews* 6.6.1 states explicitly that "the Romans brought their ensigns to the temple and set them over against its eastern gate, and there they offered sacrifices to them, and there did they make Titus *imperator* with the greatest acclamations of joy". Philip Schaff, the nineteenth-century church historian, concluded directly: "The Romans planted their eagles on the formless ruins, opposite the eastern gate, offered sacrifices to them, and proclaimed Titus Imperator... Thus the prophecy concerning the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place was fulfilled".[24][23]

The Precise Cessation of the *Tamid*

A distinctive feature shared by both Daniel 8 and Daniel 11 is the cessation of the *tamid* (daily burnt offering) as a precondition of or concomitant to the desolating act. In AD 66, priest Eleazar, "incensed at Roman high-handedness, led a movement to stop offering the customary Temple sacrifices on behalf of the emperor" — what Josephus called "the true beginning of our war with the Romans". Then in AD 70, on the 17th of Tamuz, Josephus himself records that "the sacrifice called 'the Daily Sacrifice' had failed, and had not been offered to God, for want of men to offer it, and that the people were grievously troubled at it". Daniel 12:11's precision — "From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days" — aligns with the interval between the cessation of imperial sacrifices (Av, AD 66) and the Roman army's arrival at the gates of Jerusalem in AD 70.[20][21][27]

Part V: Jesus's Explicit Connection of Both Chapters to the First Century

The Olivet Discourse Citation

In Matthew 24:15, Jesus says: "When you see the *abomination of desolation* which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place — let the reader understand — then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." The NIV footnote at Matthew 24:15 cross-references Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11 simultaneously, confirming that Jesus's single citation encompasses the entire Danielic cluster. He drew no distinction between chapters 8 and 11; for Jesus, all these expressions named the same prophetic reality awaiting a final first-century realization.[28]

Luke 21:20 as the Interpretive Key

Mark 13:14 preserves the Danielic language (*to bdelygma tēs erēmōseōs*), while Luke 21:20 — recording the same discourse — defines the term operationally: "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near". The

standard exegetical conclusion is that Luke is *interpreting* the Danielic phrase for a Gentile audience by identifying the armies as the concrete, visible fulfillment of what Daniel called the abomination of desolation. Roman armies carried idolatrous ensigns wherever they traveled — ensigns that Jews found abominable because they violated the law against graven images — making the Roman army itself, as a whole, what Daniel had prophesied.[29][30][28][24]

"This Generation Shall Not Pass"

Jesus bounded the fulfillment within a specific temporal horizon: "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place" (Matt. 24:34). In every synoptic usage, "this generation" refers to Jesus's contemporaries — those living in the first century CE. This temporal marker is not peripheral; it is Jesus's own interpretive key to Daniel, establishing that the first-century Roman siege and destruction of Jerusalem constitutes the definitive realization of the *pesha‘ shômem* / *shiqqûts shômem* prophesied across Daniel 8 and 11.[31][32]

Part VI: Patristic and Historical Confirmation

Eusebius of Caesarea

The church historian Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3, Chapter 5) records that the Christian community in Jerusalem, forewarned by an oracle, fled to Pella in Perea before the Roman siege — a direct response to Jesus's instructions in Matthew 24:15–20, which themselves were drawn from Daniel. Eusebius further states explicitly that "the abomination of desolation stood in the Temple" in reference to the AD 70 events.[32][31][24]

Chrysostom, Origen, and Others

- **Origen** (cited by Eusebius): "Luke very clearly bears witness that the prophecy of Daniel was fulfilled when Jerusalem was overthrown"[33]
- **Chrysostom** (379): "He who had desolated the city and the temple, placed his statue within the temple" — identifying the

Roman statues/ensigns as the fulfillment[33]
- **Theophylact of Ochrida** (d. 1108): "The abomination of desolation is the statue of the captor of the city. For every idol is called an abomination. And it is one of desolation because after the Romans had captured Jerusalem, they laid waste to it... and set up this statue within the sanctuary of the temple"[24]

These voices, representing multiple centuries and theological traditions, consistently identified the Roman desecration as the event Daniel encoded in both chapters.

Part VII: Synthesis — Why Both Phrases Describe the Same Event

The argument that *pesha‘ shômem* (Dan. 8:13) and *shiqqûts shômem* (Dan. 11:31) describe the same event in the first century rests on five converging lines of evidence:

1. **Shared Hebrew root**: Both expressions deploy *shômem*, establishing a unified semantic field of "desolating sacrilege" across both chapters.[2][3]
2. **Parallel structural sequence**: Both chapters describe the same four-element sequence — (a) the *tamid* is removed, (b) the sanctuary is profaned, (c) an abominable/transgressive act is committed, and (d) the people and sanctuary are trampled. The structural identity proves the referent is the same category of event.[25][5][17]
3. **Typological escalation**: Antiochus IV provides the historical prototype in both chapters, but Daniel 11 continues beyond v. 35 into "the time of the end" — and Jesus explicitly places the ultimate fulfillment in the first century, not in the Maccabean era. The Antiochus events were a *type*; the Roman desecration was the *antitype*, precisely replicating (and exceeding) the Antiochene pattern.[34][35][36][19]
4. **Jesus's synoptic synthesis**: By citing "Daniel the prophet" without distinction between chapters 8 or 11, and by anchoring fulfillment to "this generation," Jesus himself treats the Danielic *desolation* cluster as a unified prophecy pointing toward one event — the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.[28][32]

5. **Historical precision**: The precise cessation of the *tamid* in AD 66–70, the erection of idolatrous Roman ensigns in the temple precincts (Josephus, *Wars* 6.6.1), the pig-sacrifice parallel, the flight of Christians to Pella (Eusebius), and Daniel 12:11's 1,290-day interval all converge on the first-century Roman siege — confirming that Daniel 8's *transgression that makes desolate* and Daniel 11's *abomination of desolation* are not merely similar expressions, but two angles of vision on the same eschatological reality, which reached its complete fulfillment in the generation of Jesus's disciples.[27][23][24]

Conclusion

Daniel 8's *peshaʿ shômem* and Daniel 11's *shiqqûts shômem* are linguistically related, structurally parallel, and historically convergent descriptions of the same covenantal desecration — the removal of legitimate Temple worship and the enthronement of idolatrous abomination in the holy place. While Antiochus IV Epiphanes (167 BC) provided a literal initial fulfillment in both chapters, the prophetic trajectory was never exhausted there. The historical markers embedded in both visions — the Medo-Persian ram, the Greek goat, the four Diadochi horns, the Seleucid little horn — anchor the visions in history precisely so that readers could recognize the same pattern when it recurred at a greater scale. Jesus cited "Daniel the prophet" as the interpretive framework for his disciples' experience and commanded first-century action based on first-century fulfillment. Josephus, Eusebius, Chrysostom, Origen, and Theophylact all confirmed that the Roman desecration of AD 70 — the erection of idolatrous ensigns, the cessation of the *tamid*, the trampling of Jerusalem — was exactly what Daniel had foreseen under both names.

The "transgression that makes desolate" and the "abomination of desolation" are not two different events separated by centuries. They are one prophetic reality, seen from two angles, that came to its definitive historical resolution in the first century CE.

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